



Speech by

**Andrew Cripps**

**MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK**

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## **EDUCATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr CRIPPS** (Hinchinbrook—NPA) (4.10 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Education Legislation Amendment Bill. I believe the bill is fairly uncontroversial in its intent in so far as the two main objectives of the bill are to amend the Education (Queensland College of Teachers) Act 2005 to replace the term 'professional learning' with the term 'professional development' and to amend the Education (Queensland Studies Authority) Act 2002 to give the Queensland Studies Authority functions in relation to the administration of common national tests in literacy and numeracy.

The Education (Queensland College of Teachers) Act 2005 requires the Queensland College of Teachers to develop a continuing professional learning framework for the continuing professional learning of registered teachers. The term 'professional learning' as it is used in 'continuing professional learning' is no longer considered to accurately reflect the type of activities and learning that teachers are required to achieve under the act. As such, it is proposed to change the terminology from 'professional learning' to 'professional development'. The term 'professional development' is used widely in other professions and more accurately describes the types of skills enhancement activities that are undertaken by teachers under the continuing professional learning framework.

It is opportune during a debate such as this one to reflect on how our teachers are trained to teach. It is a question that has been contemplated recently in the Commonwealth parliament by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training. Its report entitled *Top of the class* was tabled in the Commonwealth parliament on 26 February 2007 and proposed a requirement for student teachers to sit a literacy and numeracy test when starting their university course. It further proposed a requirement for teachers to undertake continuing education to qualify for registration and higher rates of pay.

The committee further recommended, amongst other things, that a national accreditation system of university teaching courses be established with accreditation made a condition of receiving federal funding and for national teacher registration to be introduced with the system to be administered by individual states. The report also calls for an increase in funding for education students while at university and when undertaking their practical component and a one-year induction program for beginning teachers. It also recommended that overall funding for teaching courses be increased by about \$1,800 per full-time student.

It makes sense to assume that an increased investment in teacher education will ultimately result in better outcomes for every other dollar of funding in the education system complementing spending on facilities and resources. Certainly if our students have the benefit of being taught by better trained teachers, skilled in the art of teaching and not just in the subject matter being taught, the outcomes will be better for students.

The obvious question to be asked in conjunction with this recommendation is: how effective is the current regime of teacher training in Australia? I strongly believe that the quality and effectiveness of the classroom teacher is one of the most important determinants of successful learning. That was certainly my experience when I was a student, particularly at a secondary level but also at a tertiary level.

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training report to which I refer found that the current system of teacher education was sound. But contrary opinions were put in a number of submissions made to the committee during its inquiry. Formal teacher education is a requirement for entering the teaching profession. Some have espoused the view that it is a weakness of the system for universities to have a monopoly over all aspects of teacher training—that is, being responsible, as they are, for the selection, training, assessment and certification of graduates as competent to teach.

One such submission to this inquiry into teacher education by the Australian Secondary Principals Association cited results from a questionnaire of new teachers where the respondents indicated that their more experienced colleagues in the workplace itself had provided the most worthwhile support and advice with relatively little value being given to that provided by university personnel. So there is some criticism of the institutions delivering teacher training.

I am pleased to say that the educators in my electorate of Hinchinbrook took an interest in this inquiry and made a submission to the committee. Mr Glen Scarffe, formerly a maths and physics teacher at Tully State High School in my electorate, made a detailed and thoughtful submission for which I commend him. I table a copy of his submission to demonstrate that practising educators in the system are thinking critically about their profession, are concerned about its reputation and believe that there are a range of changes that could be made to improve the skills of teachers.

*Tabled paper:* Copy of a submission, undated, by Glenn Scarffe, Maths/Physics Teacher, Tully State High School, to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training Inquiry into Teacher Education.

Mr Scarffe's submission is constructive and innovative and deserves to be considered by the Queensland minister for education. I urge him to obtain a copy of Mr Scarffe's submission to see what grassroots teachers are thinking about their profession in Queensland.

As part of its national assessment program the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs has agreed that common national tests in literacy and numeracy will take place for the first time across Australia in May 2008 for students in years 3, 5, 7 and 9. Prior to this occurring the Australian government will make a regulation specifying common testing standards which will include the common national tests. The results from the national literacy and numeracy tests will provide a measure of how Australian schools and students are performing in the areas of reading, writing, spelling and numeracy. The results will be used for individual students, reporting to parents, schools reporting to their communities and aggregate reporting by states and territories against national standards.

The Queensland Studies Authority, which is established under the Education (Queensland Studies Authority) Act 2002, will be involved in the development of the common national test. It will also have a role in the administration and delivery of the tests in Queensland. The functions of the authority, as outlined in the QSA Act, do not cover those proposed roles. The bill will amend the QSA Act to allow the authority to fulfil its role in relation to common national tests.

This move towards common national tests has been inspired by widespread concern about basic literacy and numeracy standards in young people as well as the perception that basic core subjects have been neglected in schools. What should be taught in schools? It is a perennial question.

At this time, it is probably worthwhile to reflect on recent comments by the minister for education who has expressed a view that there is a widespread problem of parents doing a poor job of raising their children and that school teachers ought to undertake more of a parenting role in the classroom. I understand the minister's view and, like him, I lament a growing trend in our community where many parents are abdicating their core responsibilities of raising their children to meet the challenges, practical and social, that they will face in their everyday adult life.

I think we would be letting underperforming parents off the hook by expecting school teachers to shoulder more of a burden as far as parenting is concerned. Indeed, a substantial amount of time is already allocated inside school hours for life skills classes and the established personal relationships curriculum as well as practical subjects such as woodwork, metal work, manual arts and home economics. This is not to mention the everyday efforts of schoolteachers to maintain discipline in the classroom to facilitate a good learning environment for all students. On many occasions these efforts are considerable, ongoing and achieved with great difficulty.

Reports of increased behavioural problems in our schools are very widespread and are becoming increasingly serious. It has inspired the Queensland coalition to introduce the Criminal Code (Protecting School Students and Members of Staff from Assaults) Amendment Bill. I congratulate my colleague the shadow minister for education, the member for Cunningham, on that initiative. I would expect the state government—

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Moorhead): Member for Hinchinbrook, be careful that you do not pre-empt debate on the *Notice Paper*.

**Mr CRIPPS:** Understood. But on that point I would expect the state government to support that private members' bill.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member for Hinchinbrook, please refrain from discussing that issue.

**Mr CRIPPS:** Understood, but one would hope that there would be general support for such a bill which looks to provide teachers with a safe working environment and assist the majority of students who are well behaved and deserve to attend school and be educated in a conducive learning environment.

I do not believe teachers should be expected to replace the role of parents as being the primary source of information about life skills for our young people. Our schools should not be seen as tools to address the widespread problem of parents not taking full responsibility for supervising the social and emotional growth of their children. I understand that the minister for education has indicated the focus of the new initiative would be on prevention and early intervention and that the need to pursue this program was a result of a changing society where there is an increase in the number of single parent families or situations where there are two parents working full time. These are indisputable trends in modern society. Perhaps a more effective strategy would be to address the causes of the increase in single parent families and to pursue policies that might make it a financially viable proposition for one parent not to work full time. This might address the root cause of the problem, which the minister for education has correctly identified, and would be more effective than asking schoolteachers to take on even more of a parenting role. I feel this would be more of a proactive rather than a reactive policy and would perhaps more effectively address the problem at hand.

The answers to such fundamental problems as the durability of the family unit do not lie principally in the Education portfolio. The minister for education is deserving of some recognition for at least being determined enough to raise the issue. The solutions do not necessarily reside with any number of portfolios or with any number of bureaucracies at any level of government but with a more widespread social and community challenge to parents to take responsibility for raising their children—a relatively simple concept, seemingly, that is increasingly and regrettably being abandoned by more parents in recent times.

Asking teachers to accept the additional responsibility of delivering social and emotional guidance could be counterproductive and might encourage parents who are already failing to provide this basic pastoral care to their children to be comforted in the knowledge that teachers will be picking up the slack. Good teachers have always contributed positively to the development of young people by being good role models and doing their job properly. I agree that this is not always confined to the academic instruction of students in the classroom, but we ought not make schoolteachers take responsibility for parenting—a role which should be properly undertaken by parents. If parents are not taking responsibility for raising their children properly, we as a community and perhaps even as a parliament ought to insist that they do so, because parenthood ought to be considered to be a privilege and, like all privileges, it is accompanied by both rights and responsibilities.

Lastly, on the issue of common national tests in literacy and numeracy, I am pleased to support these initiatives in the core subject areas across and between all schools. However, in achieving standards and benchmarks, it is important to recognise the individual circumstances and learning environments of individual schools and allow schools to achieve those targets, as long as they are achieved, in different ways. I certainly want to recognise and support a number of schools in my electorate of Hinchinbrook and acknowledge the way in which they achieve high standards of education in different environments. I want to recognise the varied subject areas in which they specialise and excel outside of the core numeracy and literacy curriculum and how those subjects provide unique opportunities for their students, and I want to encourage those schools to continue to pursue and improve in those areas. With those remarks on the record, I am happy to support the bill.